

TRANSLATION

As I explained in the introduction to this chapter, the translation that follows is based on two manuscripts, one preserved at the London India Office, and the second one at the Library of the University of Cambridge dated 1040/1631. The text has been checked against two editions kept also in Cambridge, dated 1336/1917 and 1340/1921.

Words in square brackets are my own additions intended to clarify the English meaning of a sentence or of an expression. Annotations to this work constitute part three of this chapter.

This English rendition of the work by Al-Jili has been checked against Clément-François' French translation. Although the French translator does not give any indication of the original text on which his translation is based, evidence – established on an analysis of the choice of alternative readings available for some given sections and of the one evidently available to the translator – suggests that Clément-François' version may rely on the Indian second edition published in 1336/1917 and kept at the Library of the University of Cambridge. Unless of course he has used other sources not available to me from among those I have listed at the beginning of this fourth chapter. The 2002 French edition has been useful in re-examining my own translation of some difficult and ambiguous passages. What I have not found particularly helpful are the numerous chapters on “pseudo-Islamic” Metaphysics contained in the book which, by the author's own admission in his general introduction, tend to go off the point of the intended subject of Al-Jili's work. They deal with digressions on the significance of symbolism in esotericism and with other such matters in my opinion rather unrelated to the mystic's doctrine and historical and cultural background, and often in pantheistic terms identifying the Supreme Being with the created order and the Qur'an with Allah.¹ The author frequently draws gratuitous parallelisms between Christianity and Islam, comparing for instance the words of the Christian consecration of the bread to the Basmala,² or pointing to the sign of the cross generated by the superimposition of the letters Alif and Ba'.³

The Cave and the Inscription

A Commentary to the (Formula) “In the Name of God the All
Compassionate and Most Merciful”

INTRODUCTION

Praise be to God, Who conceals Himself under the cover of His essence. Who exists within the “heavy Clouds”⁵ of His depths. Who is complete in His names and attributes. Who unites by His divinity the composition of His opposites. The One, in His loftiness. The numerical one Whose attributes encompass all that He fulfils.⁶ The Eternal that has no end. The Eternal that has no beginning. Who manifests Himself in every form and meaning in His suwar⁷ and verses. Who is evidently and undoubtedly beyond any empiricism and verbalisation and (faulty) imagination and rationalisation. Taking the forms of all the creatures He Himself has created.⁸ Who is Himself the form of the world (found) among His human beings, His animals, His plants and His inanimate objects, abandoned under the canopy of His glory,⁹ (clear of any concept) of continuity, discontinuity, opposite, equal partner, quantification, qualification, corporality, finitude, or limitation (imposed) by anthropomorphic (representations)¹⁰ of Him or (even) by their elimination.¹¹

(Like) a swimmer His names have swum immersing themselves in the oceans of His being without reaching His boundaries.¹² He is pictured in every picture. Intimate with every intimate friend; a participant in every gathering; inaccessible in every way; supremely distinctive, completely unrestrained and completely bound,¹³ confined within

every border, unlimitedly holy and clear of His anthropomorphizations.

Space does not restrict Him but is not empty of Him. The eye does not see Him but cannot hide from Him. He is the original causal determinant (Ma‘na) of creation - (which is) an accident (derived) from an essence¹⁴ - and He is the reality (haqiqah) of that essence and no accident can diminish Him. He is the provider and origin of sustenance, which He lowered to the rank of what is called creation, so that He may carry out the authority more adequate to His own rank, in addition to what wisdom requires, and the authority of His decrees demands.

Unknown, (belonging to) the reality of the transcendent: “I was an unknown treasure and I longed to be known”; thereupon He made himself known to His creation by what is known of His instructions (Ta‘rifat). He made of creation a place for Himself to reside in, but it does not exceed Him. And He prescribed the name of Truth as a mode that has its origin in Him, that nothing would be beneficial for you without Him. And He prescribed that His divinity combine all the aspects of His reality. For He has established that His divinity should encompass His oneness and His oneness have jurisdiction over His divinity. One comes across every aspect of His essence according to the rank into which He has manifested it, but nothing of all that exists can know it in its great beauty except He Himself.

I praise Him - Praise Him for Himself behind the canopy of his eternal divine mystery. Praise Him with the tongue of His perfect eternal beauty. (Praise) Him as He praises Himself in His (divine) state.

As I am unable to praise Him I lean onto the honourable and the greatest; secret of the divine secret, the one who joins together, the most obscure; dot that is the eye¹⁶ of the dotted letters: Mu‘ammad, lord of the Arabs and of the non-Arabs. Repository of the sanctuary of (all) truths and of (divine) oneness. Meeting place of the minutiae of transcendence and finitude. Revealer of the causal determinant (Ma‘na) of beauty old and new. Form of the perfect essence. The eternal and the everlasting in the gardens of the (divine) attributes, eternally manifesting Himself in the sphere of divine affairs. May God bless and grant salvation to him and to his leading people peace - those who adorn themselves with the pearls of those who (in their turn) annihilate themselves for his sake; those who with his teachings and his actions take stance on his behalf and in his place for him; and upon his family and his companions and his progeny and his offspring honour, respect, glory and exaltation.

And after this (let us now continue) - Indeed I have consulted God - may He be exalted - about compiling this book entitled “The Cave and the Inscription” as a commentary to the (formula) “In the Name of God the All Compassionate and Most Merciful”, induced by my merciful (God) and in answer to a question by a noble master (and) brother, a (man) that possessed a sharp mind and a brilliant, well versed, firmly established intelligence. Also (engaged in) asceticism and isolation and (endowed) with truthful intention in (his) pursuits. (Namely) Imad Al-Din Ya‘ya Bin Abi Al-Qasim Al-Tunisi Al-Maghribi, (great?) grandson of Al-‘asan¹⁷ son of ‘Ali. I resisted and delayed progress towards what he desired. He did not tolerate hearsay and he did not lean towards anything but what he himself had propounded. The sincerity of his wish drove me to conform to it. And I have consulted God (and) in fear¹⁸ I have sought refuge in Him. I ask Him - may He be praised and exalted - that by (this book) He may benefit its public, those who will hear it (being read) and its readers. May He grant my request.¹⁹

And it is expected of the people of God²⁰ - who are our leaders, the brothers who will look into this book - may God’s peace and His favour be upon them - that they

should scrutinise²¹ the meaning of every word until its explanation pleases them, from the perspective of (each word's) interpretations, symbolic expressions, explicit, implicit and metaphorical meanings, "forwarding and delaying".²² Observing the laws of poetry and the fundamentals of religion. And if they meet with one of the meanings of the oneness (of God) - to which both the (Sacred) Book and the Sunna bear witness - this is the reason why I have written the book. And if they understood from it the opposite of that, I am not responsible for such understanding. They should reject it and seek instead what I have written in conformity to the (Sacred) Book and the Sunna, and indeed God will confront them with that Sunna that among His creatures gave honour to Him Who has power over all things. Furthermore it is requested of them that they should strengthen us with their divine souls and accept us in spite of what is contained in this (book) of ours. And this is a minor strain that I have placed in their hands, hoping on the prayer of the saved or the watchful gaze of the Saint.

"If you find a fault, close the gap".

"Those who have no fault in themselves, are great and of a higher rank".

And here I begin - In all that I mentioned (earlier) I seek help in God, I fix my gaze on God, I take hold of God. Away from God what else is there if not God? And God speaks the truth.²³ And I have no (hope) to succeed (in this endeavour) except in God.

SECTION 1

In the name of God the all Compassionate
and Most Merciful

It has been reported (by Tradition) about the Prophet - may God bless and grant salvation to him - that he said, "All that is contained in the revealed books is contained in the Qur'an, and all that is contained in the Qur'an is contained in the Fati'a, and all that is contained in the Fati'a is contained in (the formula) In the Name of God the All Compassionate and Most Merciful". It has also been reported that "all that is contained in (the formula) In the Name of God the All Compassionate and Most Merciful is contained in the (letter) Ba' () and all that is contained in the Ba' is contained in the dot that is under the Ba'." Some of the masters (□Arifun) have said that (the formula) In the Name of God (pronounced) by a master is the equivalent of the (word) Be! (Kun) (pronounced) by God.

(The reader) should know that the discussion on (the formula) In the Name of God the All Compassionate and Most Merciful presents many perspectives - such as syntax, morphology, language and the debate within it on the subject of the letters, their forms, their nature, their shape, their composition and their privileges over the rest of the letters found in the Fati'a of the (Sacred) Book, their combination within it and the peculiarities of the letters found in the Ba'; as well as the debate about them concerning their benefits and their secrets. We are not interested in that, but our discussion on this subject will be from the perspective of their true sense and meaning in all that befits the Source of all truth - may He be praised and exalted. The elements of this debate are interdependent because the purpose of these principles is the recognition of God - may He be praised and exalted. Therefore, every time that the flow of His permanent outpouring will be renewed (as) in (the exhaling) of breaths, the Trustworthy Soul²⁶ will descend onto the heart of the Tablet.

You (should) know that the dot that is under the Ba' is the beginning of every sura from the Book of God - may He be exalted. Because the letter is made of the dot it is inevitable for each sura to begin with a letter and for each letter to begin with a dot. It

follows from this that the dot is the beginning of every sura from the Book of God - may He be exalted. Being the dot as we have indicated, then the relationship between (the dot) and the Ba' is complete and perfect for the explanation that follows: the Ba' is at the beginning of all suwar since the Basmala is required in every sura, even the sura (called) "Immunity".²⁷ Indeed the Ba' is the first letter in it. Therefore the whole Qur'an is (contained) in every sura of the Book of God - may He be exalted - for the reason previously mentioned that the whole Qur'an is (contained) in the Fatiha, which is (contained) in the Basmala, which is (contained) in the Ba', which is (contained) in the dot. In the same way God - may He be praised and exalted - is totally present in everyone: He is irreplaceable and indivisible. Therefore the dot points to the essence of God - may He be exalted - unseen behind the canopy of His treasure, (being that the way) in which He appears to His creation.

Don't you realize that you can see the dot but you can't read it at all because of its muteness and its freedom from the restrictions of phonetics? Purest soul of the letters that originate from all (possible vocal) articulations. Imagine dividing (the letter Ba' into its components) then the "curl" part (of the letter) warns you of what (may) be coming but you will be reading the dot, taking into consideration the joining (of the letter with other letters forming a given word). Let's take now the case of the letter Ta', the one with two dots: if you add to it a dot, you will call it Tha' the one with three dots. Then you would have read nothing else but the dot, because the Ba', the Ta' with two dots and (the Tha') with three dots having the same shape cannot be read except in virtue of their dots. If they could be read independently (without the dots), then the shape of each one would differ from that of the other. Instead it is because of the dot that they are distinguishable and nothing else is being read in the letter but the dot. In the same way nothing can be distinguished in creation except God. And as I can distinguish God from creation, I can also distinguish it from God.

The dot however in some letters is more distinguishable than in others. In fact it appears in some as an addition: it appears to complete such letters, such in the case of the dotted letters - indeed it completes them. In some (however) it seems to be like their essence, as it is the case with the Alif (

) and the un-dotted letters. Because the Alif is made up of the dot, and for this reason it is superior to the Ba', given that the dot is manifested in its essence, while in the Ba' it appears as a completion expressed as the merger (of two elements). Because the dot is like the banner of the letter, united to the letter. This unity however also reveals (their) difference, this being the separation that you see between the letter and the dot. Whereas the Alif has a collocation of its own. Therefore the Alif is visible by itself in every letter. For example you can say that the Ba' is an outstretched Alif, and the Jim is an Alif crooked at both ends, and the Dal () is an Alif bent in the middle. In the composition of each letter the Alif has the same role that the dot has, inasmuch as every letter is made of the dot. To each letter the dot is like a simple atom and the letter like a body made of (atoms). And the role of the Alif with its shape is the same as that of the dot. Thus they make up the letters.

As we mentioned before, the Ba' is an outstretched Alif. Likewise, the world in its entirety was created out of the Mu ammadaan reality (Al- aqiqa al-mu ammediyya). It can be inferred from this, according to what Jabir²⁸ reports in the adith, that God - may He be exalted - created the Prophet's soul - may God bless and grant salvation to him and his family - from His own being and created the world in its entirety from the soul of Mu ammad - may God bless and grant salvation to him.²⁹ Therefore Mu ammad - may

God bless and grant salvation to him - is, among the things created in His name,³⁰ the outward expression of divine manifestations.

Don't you see that he - may God bless and grant salvation to him - travelled by night with his body³¹ up to the Throne - the abode of the All Compassionate? For the Alif and the rest of the un-dotted letters that are just like it, the dot appears in them in its essence. As for (the dot's) outward manifestations in the Alif, they are expressed in its sum: since the dot has no dimension except for one degree, therefore if two dots are joined together they form an Alif, and the Alif seeks one dimension, namely length. Because there are three dimensions: length, width and depth or thickness. The rest of the letters are made of more than one dimension. Such as in the case of the Jim, for indeed in its head there is length and in its root thickness. Or in the case of the Kaf ()for indeed in

its head there is length and in the middle between the head and its first root there is width and in the partition between the two roots there is thickness. Therefore it has three dimensions. Every letter necessarily has two or three dimensions. Except for the Alif. The Alif therefore is closer to the dot because the dot has no dimension. The relation of the Alif to the (other) un-dotted letters is like the relation of Mu ammada - may God bless and grant salvation to him - to the (other) prophets and possessors of perfect kindness. For this reason the Alif has received priority over all other letters.

Think and ponder. From among the letters some will have the dot on top while (the letter) is underneath. This is the condition by which you do not see anything without (having seen) God before.

From among the letters others will have the dot underneath.³² This is the condition by which you can't see anything without (seeing) God beyond.

From among the letters still others will have the dot in the middle; such is the case with the white dot in the heart of the (letters) Mim, Waw and similar (letters). This is the place where you do not see anything except God within it. This is the reason why it is rendered hollow: because it is a spine in whose stomach there is something other than itself. Therefore, the circle of the head of the Mim is the place where you cannot see anything, while its white dot is³³ where you can only see God. The Alif is instead the place where "those who pledge their allegiance to you indeed (Innama) pledge their allegiance to God".³⁴

It is said about the meaning of innama that it has the same value of ma illa,³⁵ and its interpretation³⁶ is that those who pledge their allegiance to you, do not pledge their allegiance except to God. It is well known that Mu ammada - may God bless and grant salvation to him - received pledges of allegiance, and God bore witness to Himself that those pledges were actually made to no other than God. As if saying that you were not Mu ammada when you received pledges of allegiance, but indeed, you were God concealed, because truly they were making their pledges to God. And this is what vicariousness means. Don't you see how appropriate it is for the Messenger of God - may God bless and grant salvation to him - or the envoy of the king to say to whomever is taking his place, "Indeed you have taken the place of the king". Likewise the king will tell those to whom he has dispatched his envoy, "Don't assume that he is just so and so; indeed he is me", thus emphasizing with them obedience to himself.

SECTION 2

The dot of the Ba' is alone in its transcendental world. It has no division in itself although it appears as two in the Ta' with two dots, and as three in the three-dotted

letter. Indicating, as a deterrent and a warning against those who claim (that God has as His) partner one who is second of two, or third of three, that although it may seem to be multiple, in its essence the dot is one. (Don't you see that) He is one - may He be praised and exalted. That (only) by the imagination of the polytheist He has a partner. That the partnership in which the polytheist in his imagination believes is indeed a creature of God. That the true (God) is in every creature in all His fullness. So the polytheist is created, and the partner in whose partnership he believes is also created. And the believed partnership is created and the belief itself is created. Because God - may He be exalted and praised - is present in His fullness in all these things. His Being cannot be divided nor multiplied nor qualified. He is one and there is no second other.

As a consequence if you wanted to associate (a partner with God) and if you wanted to separate Him, then the partner would be God - may He be exalted³⁸ - and the polytheist would be God, and the partnership would be God. He is everlasting, except in your individuality. (Don't you see that) the dot because it is a dot and not part of a mass cannot be multiplied and cannot be divided? Likewise none from among God's people can take one of His parts. In this He is highly exalted. And you find that the dot, in virtue of its oneness, belongs in essence to the number of indivisible³⁹ (items).

(Know) that the dot in reality cannot be captured by the eye, because everything that you bring out in the physical world can be divided. Instead the dot that we now see is expression of its reality and of the boundary of its reality: a single atom that cannot be divided. As for what is invisible (and belongs to the realm) of imagination, and with (your) writing you have made manifest to the visible world, you add to its essence a property that is not essentially intrinsic to it, that is to say "divisibility." Because in the realm of beings there is hardly any singular atom - in fact there is none at all - of all that fall under the perception of the senses that cannot be divided. So when this atom appeared under this letter (Ba') it was distributed, even though it cannot be divided.

This is the place of the anthropomorphization of God, as (for example) in the expressions "(God's) two hands" and "two feet"⁴⁰ and "the face (of God)".⁴¹ And in the $\square$ adith (called) The Wings,⁴² "I saw my Lord in the form of a beardless youth wearing golden sandals".⁴³

This reference to His perfection is (about) immanence (Tashbih) contained within transcendence (Tanzih). Indeed, by definition God is the Infallible One Who has no equal. The One Who hears and sees (everything). He regards it as permissible to impose anthropomorphism on Him, and that alone. Since His immanence is contained in His transcendence and vice versa - in virtue of the opinion provided by the phraseology of the (Sacred) Book and the Sunna - the invisible world will appear to you in the visible world, and the visible world will conceal itself from you within the invisible world. In the same way since the dot is indeed in all the letters, all the letters are forced into it. What I mean by forced is that the permanence of the letters in (the dot) is sensible but their presence cannot be perceived before they (are made to) emerge from it in your composition.⁴⁴

SECTION 3

The dot said to the Ba', "O letter, indeed I am your origin because out of me you have been composed. But then it is you who in your composition are my origin. Because every portion of you is a dot. So you are the whole and I am the portion, and the whole is the origin while the portion is the derivative. However, I am truly the origin, because composing you is in my nature and essence.⁴⁵ Do not look at my projection outside you⁴⁶ and say, This protruding is not (part of) me. Indeed I only see you as having

my own identity. And if not for my presence in you there would not be for me such a relation with you. Until when will you turn away from me in your exteriority and place me behind your shoulders? Make of your interior your exterior, and of your exterior your interior. Do you not realise my unity with you? If not for you I would not be the dot of the Ba', and if not for me you would not be the dotted Ba'.

"How many times do I have to give you examples so that you understand my unity with you and you know that your extension into the visible realm and my concealment in the transcendental world are two principles of our single essence? There is no partner in me for you, no partner for you in me. What are you if not yourself? Because your name had its origin in my name, don't you see that of the different parts (that make up your whole) the first part is called a dot, the second part is called a dot, and the third part is called a dot?⁴⁷ Likewise all your parts are dot by dot. Therefore I am you. What within you is your individuality but my own identity? This is your individuality by which you are who you are. If you said to yourself I, portraying my being, even I if I said He⁴⁸ I would portray my own image. Then you would therefore know that I and He are two modes of expression of the same essence."

And the Ba' replied, "My master, it has been established that you are my origin. You know that the derivative and the origin are two (different) things. This body of mine is stretched and composite. I do not exist outside of (this body). Instead you are a small atom found in everything. While I am a heavy body, confined to a single space. Where does it come from for me, therefore, this status of master, and from where (this idea) that I am you? How can your state be my state?"

And the dot answered by saying, "The tangibility of your physicality and the abstractness of my spiritual (nature) constitute (respectively) one of my forms and one of my attributes. Because all of the different letters and the words in their entirety are only representations of me.

"Where does plurality therefore come from? Since we have not established (for example) that (the number) ten is the name (used to indicate) the sum of two given fives. Where then does the difference between five and ten come from? If not by name, from the concept of the decimal.

"If you, in all your expressions, are one of my depictions and one of my reflections, where does the duality between me and you come from? And why this debate between me and you? I am origin of all that is purposed in you and of all that is purposed in me. This in its totality is my essence, defined by divine will.

"If you wish to comprehend me, imagine yourself and all the letters, and the words small and big, and then say⁴⁹ Dot. That, in its totality, is the essence of my self, and my self is the essence of all that. But your self is the totality of that essence. The totality of my essence and yours.⁵⁰ However there is no you and no they. I am the whole. Yet there is no I and no you and no they and no one and no two and no three. There is nothing else but the one dot. In it there is no comprehension and no understanding for those like you. (Only) if you were to change from your clothes into my clothes you would know all that I know, and witness all that I witness, and hear all that I hear, and see all that I see."

And the Ba' replied by saying, "What you have just said is intensely shining! It is given to me to fulfil it at the dawning of this new day. You have said that remoteness and proximity, quantity and quality, (they all derive) from the command of your being. (With) all that I have attended to of the discourse on (this) ordering, and all the other necessary things, I am at peace, and I depart with my face turned to the domain of my manifestation and the fulfilling of my necessarily harmonious relationship with you.

“Whenever I roam the realm of my significance I find you as my (true) self. And if I seek in myself what pertains to you as regards the untying and joining together of the letters, and as regards the manifestations of your perfection in each letter, I cannot find anything; the glass of my endeavour breaks, and I return crestfallen.”

And the dot said, “Yes, (crestfallen) you will return because you sought by yourself, and, according to you, your self is not my self. Therefore, you will not find in it what is mine. If you searched in it for the I who is the you in myself - that is, your self, you would have entered the house from its door, and at that time you would not have looked for what pertains to the dot, except in the dot (itself). But you did not look for the dot except in the wrong place.”⁵¹ Find then the meaning of this if you are with us!

POETRY

These tents have appeared⁵³ (held up) on the (tent) ropes.
Dismount here if you are among their friends.
Stop among these features.
At it, ages have stopped in their heydays.
Hind is no other than she who dwelled unwillingly.
With willow trees and bushes beside.
Untie your mount in the dwellings,
For indeed this is a blessed home for those who live in it.
How excellent are
the homes that were honoured
By their dwellers and (the dwellers) were honoured by the soil (on which the homes stand).
You cannot differentiate between its chambers.
Obscure, locked behind their doors.
Those who live in this neighbourhood are their people;
those who deserted them are not from their lineage.
(The Ba’) is the soul, and it is a dark letter. In addition, in the entire Basmala
there are no dark letters besides it. By dark letters, I mean
The bright ones that are abbreviated at the beginning of the suwar⁵⁵ are

God made of the letter Ba’ the beginning of the Qur’an in every sura because the first veil between you and His (divine) Being - praise to Him - is darkness. But when your being ceases to exist and nothing will remain except Him, His names and attributes that originate in Him, that will be a veil upon Him; but that is brightness.

Except for the Ba’ that represents your existence and is dark.⁵⁶ For this reason the Ba’ is a cloak over the dot because it is over it, (like) the cloak is over the garments. The Ba’ is darkness to the light of the dot, veiled (as it is) by the presence which is the visible world (that originated) from the beautiful world of the dot. In fact, a rational consideration of the appearance of the dot behind (the Ba’) points to the fact that the realm of what is (truly) real is (hidden) behind what is visible.

Since the dot is attached to the Ba’, the Ba’ is used in speech for joining. And since the shape of the dot is stretched to (form) the Ba’, the Ba’ in the speech of the Arabs is used to indicate instrumentality.⁵⁷

When the blissful fire shone⁵⁸ for the Ba’ on the tree of its soul, it penetrated the darkness of the invisible canopy of its night, away from its own world, so as to acquire fire for its constitution,⁵⁹ or to find within itself direction (in its journey) from itself to itself. It was carved out of an upright portion of the tree of the Alif that is the name of God.

Remove your shoes⁶⁰ - that is, your character and your being - for indeed, you are at the Blessed Valley, and you are occasion of doubt and defilement. There is no place for you in the Blessed Valley of the dot unless you rid your being and your character of doubt and defilement.⁶¹

Stretch out under the light of the Alif,⁶² like the shadow that stretches out, for the shadow of something is that thing. So the length of the Ba' in every writing is the same length as the line of the Alif of which it is a projection. It saw itself as a shadow of this erection, aware that its existence depended on it. Because a shadow cannot exist, except as a figure between the bodily mass and the level (ground). Its own existence was dismissed as delusion. Because the shadow by itself is not completely in existence. It is rather the separation of the figure between the concealed mass and the ground. Thus, the existence of the shadow on its own is impossible. However it is a necessary existence.

Having verified such degree of non-existence in the Ba', the Alif took it to itself and set it in its place. Then the Alif was incorporated into it. For this reason in the (formula) "In the Name of God (the All Compassionate and Most Merciful)" it grew in length and became evidence of the assimilation of the Alif. Conceptually, (the Ba') is delegate of the Alif. Formally, it is an elongated version of the Alif.⁶³ Thus, it obtained the form and the conceptual significance⁶⁴ of the Alif.

It occurred⁶⁵ to discuss the position of the Alif. In the idiom of the Arabs it is not known of any Ba' that stands in place of the Alif except for the Ba' of Bism⁶⁶ Allah. Look now at this Ba', how my sharpness has increased the condition of its great beauty.

He sang to me from my heart

And I sang as he did.

We were where they were

And they were where we were.

The Alif itself derives from al-Ulfa⁶⁷ - actually it is al-Ulfa that derives from the Alif. (You have seen) the noisy controversy and the disagreement over whether the verbal noun derives from the verb or vice-versa.⁶⁸

For this reason the Alif was joined to the Ba', because the Ba' had the decency of keeping its place under (the Alif). So it was reduced to nothing, (as) nothing is the shadow under the figure. Thus the Alif, out of its own natural generosity, provided it with its own place, because the state of the Alif is to take the form of every letter. In fact the Ba' is a stretched Alif, the Jim (

) is an Alif with the two ends bent, the Dal and the Ra' are Alif

bent in the middle, the Shin is indeed made of four Alif: each one of its teeth is an Alif and the stem is an Alif bent and stretched. This (can) be applied by analogy to the remaining (letters).

This is as far as the form is concerned. As for the conceptual significance, it is necessary to find the Alif in every letter as it is pronounced when you do its spelling. Don't you see in the Ba' if you spell it you will have to mention the Alif? And with the Jim,⁶⁹ if you spell it you say Jim, Ya' (□) and Mim. But in the Ya' with two dots underneath, the Alif is present.⁷⁰ Thus, the Alif is in every letter both formally and conceptually. Because it descends into the dot, from the invisible world into the visible world.⁷¹

That one is this one and this one is that one:⁷² there it is!

That is a part of that that is part.

That is the noble Gabriel.⁷³

He spread out⁷⁴ and conceals.⁷⁵

Says (the Prophet) - may God bless him and grant him salvation: "No thorn

will enter the leg of any of you without me feeling its pain”.⁷⁶ This is confirmation of his unity with the whole world, its individuals and its parts, so much so that he feels in himself the condition of each individual, and conversely that individual finds him in the world.

Question: what is the reason why the Alif was deleted in the Basmala and was not deleted in Read in the Name of Your Lord?⁷⁷ Answer: because the I afa⁷⁸ of the name in the former refers to God the All-encompassing Who cannot be restricted to a single attribute. While in the latter the I afa of the name refers to the Lord, and it is necessary that the Lord should have a servant to lord upon. So it is preposterous that the Ba’ should be united to (the Lord) in this context, because if servitude is lost, also the lordship is immediately lost. But where divinity is concerned, if servitude is lost, (divinity) will not be lost, because it is a name of a rank (encompassing) all ranks. The disappearance of the servant is tantamount to his non-existence, but it is understood that the Lord does not disappear, (remaining) a degree among all the degrees of divinity. So it does not disappear in any way. And when the inclusion of the Alif in this context took place and it was united to the Ba’, it was dropped in pronunciation and writing. Thus, (the formula) In the Name of God the All Compassionate and Most Merciful is pure reality, while (the verse) Read in the Name of Your Lord is pure law. Don’t you see that it recites Read! which is a command, and the command is devoted exclusively to laws? (The formula) In the Name of God the All Compassionate and Most Merciful, instead, is not confined to a command or to anything else. Let (the reader) ponder.

SECTION 4

The Alif

As the (term) union (Ulfa) derives from the Alif, (the Alif) joins the letters together. Indeed it joins some in their essence - such as for the Alif found between the Ba’, (like) a stretched Alif and each in it is the same as the others. And it joins some according to their phonetic expression, such as when you say (the letters) □a’ (□) and Kha’ (the Alif) appearing at the end of both,⁷⁹ thus being their essence in writing and in form. And no difference remains other than in their pronunciation. It joins all (the letters) by virtue of its form and its essence for the reasons discussed (above) that all letters are linked and that (the letter Alif) is present in the spelling of each letter. In the same way the Truth - Glorified and Most High - says, “If you laid out all the things that are on Earth you could not possibly join together their hearts, but God did.”

It would not have been possible even for you, O Mu ammad, and possibly (this) message is (addressed) to anyone listening intending to join together the hearts of all the things that are on Earth, by laying them out. But the Truth by His perfection and by His word has united them in their bodies, in their essence and in their attributes. He has joined together a number of them by His essence. He has joined a number of them by His attributes. He has joined a number of them by His actions and His forms. Indeed He has joined them all by His essence and all His attributes.

POETRY

Although this existence may appear multiple
By your lives!⁸⁰ Nothing is in it except you.⁸¹

SECTION 5

The letters have been attached to the Alif, but the Alif has not been attached to anything pertaining to the letters. In the same way every creature is in need of the Glorified

God, while He has no need of the worlds. One may say, “What merit preceded the existence of the Alif so that it came to be so sublimely close to the dot? And what misdeed did the (other) letters commit so as to be bypassed?” The answer is: the lack of distance between the rank of the Alif and the domain of the dot is in essence a merit that preceded the Alif, and its ransom is the characterisation (of the Alif) with the properties of the dot. “The one in whose saddle-bag (a (stolen) property) is found, will be its ransom.”⁸² Yes, while the lack of closeness to the domain of the dot in the rest of the letters is in essence a misdeed that preceded them. “Thus did We plan for Joseph: he could not take his brother by the law of the King”.

NOTE

The jot in the union of the Alif with the Ba⁸⁴ is indeed there only in virtue of the presence of the Alif. If what is in the Ba⁸⁴ were not due to the presence of the Alif phonetically, in the spelling the Alif would not be united⁸⁵ because the Alif has to be located at the extremity. This is its nature, and it is not possible to join it at the other end.⁸⁶ Therefore, if indeed union is about cessation of otherness, only the Alif can be united to an Alif. In the same way, however, every letter is united to the Alif from the extremity where the Alif is located.⁸⁷ Don't you see that when writing it, each letter would not be attached to the Alif except if the letter preceded and the Alif followed? There is no other way because the body of that letter has indeed precedence in the spelling. (However), not the body of the Alif, which therefore follows.

The body of the Alif is (manifested) either in itself or in something else, such as for the (letters) Jim, Sin and Nun, according to the distance of the letter from, or its proximity to the shape of the Alif, (and according) to (the letter's) nature and position. On this depends its cutting.⁸⁸ The Alif is found in all the letters and is attached to specific letters with a specific appearance, and it is not attached to other letters such as⁸⁹ (the letters) Dal, Dhal, Ra', Za,⁹⁰ Wau - but none besides these five letters.⁹¹

See how the Alif is present⁹² in the written shape of each of these letters. The same with the inanimate bodies and the livestock: when they all return to their Lord on the day of the Resurrection the (final) annihilation (Fana') will take place. He alone will remain in His essence. None among them is similar to Him, apart from the human beings. When they (also) return to their Lord - Glorified and Most High - He alone will remain in His essence.

It is necessary for human beings to look at the level above themselves, in their (search) for lack of ignorance, attainment of bliss and perfection of nobility - with the exclusion of that which pertains to God the Most High. Not for the inanimate bodies: God the Most High will indeed destroy them and annihilate their bodies and their (very) being because He did not grant them full existence in the world but He was manifest in them. Neither did He grant them ownership of (their own) existence. Just as one can see the Alif in the five letters (above) manifesting itself separately in its own shape and form when⁹³ joined to any of (those) letters. This stands for the non-claim to (their) existence by the inanimate objects: there is no complete existence even for a letter except when joined to the Alif. Even in spelling, given that (the Alif) is the essence of their life. Because the life of the Alif is all-pervading in the bodies of the letters, and if not for the (Alif) the letters would have no meaning. So they have been joined to it only in the spelling but not in composition, and they are devoid of (any) claim to existence.

As for the remaining letters they are in existence just as human beings are in existence - praise God. (That same existence) is their distinctive (mark). In fact it proves to

be true that (human beings) are in existence (Wujud) and to them pertains a nature (Dhat), however (they are) different from the existence and nature of anything else. Unlike the animals (for instance, that) if they had a soul they still would have no intellect and no retentive memory that would preserve in their imagination whatever they intellectualised. The limit to the understanding of the animal is given by the fact that it depends on natural appetites and animal instincts and before all else it requires a soul for memorisation and so forth. If indeed it had a memory (the animal) would preserve all that it intellectualised so much as to (be able to) analyse some rational elements above the others and then determine after that the most important and the best of them. Indeed (the animal) would then be appropriate to the (same) level of existence as that which is only of an angel or a human being, and this is not the case. For this reason the Truth did not manifest Himself to any (creature) in His Essence - I mean the essence of the Truth, (Who is) worthy of praise and exalted - except to the human beings, on account of their integration of intellect and appetite. As for the angels, because they are endowed with intellect,⁹⁴ the Truth manifests Himself in them in their own essence, not in the essence of the Truth, on account of their decline from that extensive degree of perfection (located) between immanence and transcendence. Unlike the animals that indeed have no part in this because they don't have the complete existence of the human beings. This is the reason for the human claim to existence, the supreme veil that cannot be removed except after the great death - i.e. the cessation of (the relationship between) one's cognition and one's existence - after the realisation of the "mergence in the universal unity (Tawḥīd)". Following that, it is necessary that one like you should consider what the theophanic unveiling of God is in relation to the human beings and see how their own nature and exterior form subsist. But this (divine) manifestation is not the first manifestation that you have witnessed. May you understand (this) and may God - Who has power over all things - grant us and (grant) you comprehension⁹⁵ of all this.

SECTION 6

The Alif has been freed from⁹⁶ the limits of the dot and cleared of the bindings⁹⁷ of subordination that could follow it in the same way as the joining of some letters with others after them. So it has no connection of its own essence ('Ayn) with anything (else). Because of this, in writing, the Alif is not attached to any of the letters. It is effectively physically⁹⁸ in all the letters like the dot. It has been established at the beginning of every determined noun⁹⁹ among God's names - may He be exalted Who manifests Himself as the Truth, is confirmed in the Truth, and yet no other is the Truth. And the dot is its measure by which it measures itself. (The Alif) is included in all the things in which the dot is included, as if the dot were nothing else but its principle, regulated (- as it were -) by (the dot). Instead (the Alif) is truly identical to the dot - thus one dispenses with (the risk of) dualism. Then there is no existence for what is called "Alif" except from the perspective of the dot. Indeed (the Alif) is a composite¹⁰⁰ dot and it is the letter that is made manifest by the dot according to its appearance; for it has no other appearance except for what we mentioned earlier about the stretching of all the letters and the fact that every word and letter is made of it. What emerge in (the Alif) then are multiplicity of the body and unity of the soul.

(This is) because the Alif is made of many dots one next to the other. Actually the dot - being whole - cannot be divided or multiplied. It is found in all its parts without plurality in itself. Likewise the Truth - may He be exalted - is found in the hearing of the person who approaches it by supererogatory works, and in his/her sight and in his/her hand

and on his/her tongue. However, He - praise Him - by being the hearing of this servant is not multiplied in his/her sight. Thus, He exists in His fullness in all things that make up the whole of the world but He is not multiplied by the plurality of things. Likewise the Alif, present in all of the 28 letters, is not multiplied by their plurality because in their totality the Alif is one. About this someone said that the Alif is not one of the letters, claiming that “The Perfect Human Being” is not one of the (other) creatures. May you understand (this).

SECTION 7

The number of the Alif is one, but one is not a number like the others. Because the term number refers to a progressive sequence of the one at two levels and beyond and its function is to give sense to the naming of (things) counted: at the level of variations in meaning and quantity. But the one in itself does not present any variation because it has no equals. It does not fall into the category of numbers from this perspective. However it does fall into (that category) insofar as one realises the lack of variation in itself. But it is a number unlike (any other) numbers. Likewise a rational (mind) would say that God is someone unlike anything else.

The protrusion of the Alif by its one dimension determines the passage from the dot to the number one. And this dimension is only length. Because the dot has no length, nor width, nor depth, nor height. While (the Alif) has only length in a straight line.

As for the Ba’ it manifests itself instead in the number two, having two dimensions, length and width - its head being the width and its body the length.

The Jim is made evident in the number three because it comes through length, width and depth - or if you wish you may say depth and height, for both are indeed equal, and change by changing the perspective: if you started from the bottom you would call it height, while if you came down from the top to the bottom you would call it depth.

This argumentation is not about numbers; it is instead a sublime mystery. I am the first one to reveal it. And indeed we have manifested that it was unfolded to us and we are able to say that we are talking (now) about the remainder of the whole of the numbers of the letters and their secrets. Each letter according to its location, to what the number has determined in it, its secret and the secret of each number in itself, and (all this expressed) in this truthful language, if God so wishes - may He be exalted.

(The Ba’) is the throne and the dot is the essence that speaks - called, because of some of its expressions, “the heart” that contains God. (The dot) is the hidden essence (Huwiyya), called the secret treasure that remains a treasure in its secrecy forever. The Ba’ (sets) the standard of the numbers because (the dot) is the first number and there is no number without the Ba’ in it. In the same way the (divine names) pertaining to (God’s) mercy - (setting) the standard for the (other) personal names (of God) - are called “seven names” (or “the major seven”).¹⁰¹ In fact, the same applies to every (divine) name. As the Truth says - may He be exalted, “Say: call upon God or call upon the All Compassionate; either way you call upon (the same One) to Whom (these) beautiful names”¹⁰² belong.¹⁰³ And from those (names) that are not mentioned we have, he¹⁰⁴ says, “Your transcendent (reality).”

SECTION 8

The dual meaning of the Ba’ is in the manifestation of the Truth to Himself, (and this) in the natural context of His essence (Dhat), which is the second facet. Because the Truth - may He be praised and exalted - offers two perspectives of Himself: the perspective of essential unity, in which God does not look at what one calls creation,

because in this perspective there is no creation (as yet); the perspective of essence, in which God looks at a level¹⁰⁵ called creation (Khulq), a level which is a differentiation of His Essence, and this differentiation is named attributes.

(The Ba') is this second perspective as it shows in itself the signs of the (divine) arbitrator that we define, given the Essence of God - may He be exalted - (with the attribute) "All Compassionate". Thus, He is defined by (the attribute) that sets the standards for the (other) names of the (divine) noble Truth and the world is throne, the image, that is, of the All Compassionate,¹⁰⁶ that sets the standards for the (other) names of the (divine) noble Presence. Therefore, it is said concerning Adam that he was in the image of the All Compassionate. In fact, it has become established in Sufi terminology that the human being should be called "the little world"¹⁰⁷ and the world be called "the great human being".

Be aware that the origin of "Bism Allah al-Rahman al-Rahim"¹⁰⁸ is "Bism Allah al-Rahman al-Rahim".¹⁰⁹ For¹¹⁰ it is necessary for an action to follow the Ba' to which it is connected. For example "I begin" or "I seek help" or "May I be blessed", explicitly, verbally, or implicitly indicate the connection with the action occurring after the Basmala. For instance the action of drinking after the Basmala indicates that what follows is an implicit "I drink" or "I seek help in drinking" in the name of God.¹¹¹ Should the speaker say, "In the name of God I do this", it would mean, "By God I do this". Because the name coincides with the "named".¹¹² The Exalted One said, "Blessed be the Name of thy Lord".¹¹³ And what is the meaning of you saying "By God I will do (it)" if not that He¹¹⁴ is the real agent of that action from you and in you?¹¹⁵ It is like you saying, "I do this in (the name) of whatever extrinsically divine I harbour within my being - as opposed to the Essence (Dhat) - the true reality ('Ayn), that is, that we call God; and in (the name) of whatever intrinsically divine I harbour within my being - as opposed to my manifest being - which we do not call God". (The purpose of this is) to deny that the action - if its object is to act - is originated from you, and to ascribe it to your Truth. But if the object (of the action) is naming, (the purpose of doing it in the name of God is) to express the elimination from your being of what we call "created", by the sublime power of what we call "creating act" belonging to your true existence.¹¹⁶ And if the object (of the action) is of a subjective (nature), the prominence of the oneness of your existence (Wujud) is in the plurality of its expressions of individuality. May you understand (this). In fact it is necessary for you to realize this much when you say "In the Name of God the All Compassionate and Most Merciful" so as to distinguish yourself from the rank of the animals: because to utter what you do not understand means to be at the level of animals. God forbid!

SECTION 9

Chapter on the lengthening of the Ba'

The Ba' was lengthened after dropping the Alif and after replacing it with the warning that it (would only be), from all the letters, the alternative substitute to the Alif. Before that, in the same way, the All Compassionate has been described by attributes that are (nothing more than) alternative substitutes of His name "God" - in the context of the beautiful names (employed) to give a name to Him. Creation by the One God therefore is not intelligible except in the context (of the attribute) "All Compassionate". Furthermore the created order does not possess in itself any scope at all; again, nothing except the unique pure presence that is (the divine) countenance that transcends all things. The Most High says, "All things will perish except His countenance. To Him pertains the authority and to Him you will (all) return".¹¹⁷ There is no authority except in this Oneness (present)

in all these manifestations of existence and mercy, and He is the countenance of all things. He has clearly stated, “Wherever you turn, there is the countenance of God”.¹¹⁸ With your eyes, that is - as far as the things perceptible through the senses are concerned - or with your minds, as far as intelligible things are concerned. There God’s countenance is, and of its meaning we have already spoken.

There is no one in Naqa¹¹⁹ like Su‘ad

Indeed, she is the water springs and she is the one who drinks (from them).

She is the Ba qi,

she is the soft ground.

She is Ma *ab

from Khayf,

she is the Country.

She is the plants and all the bodies.

She is the souls, the animals, the inanimate bodies.

She is the substances and the accidents all together.

She is the offspring, the fathers and the son.

Say to those who have gone purposely from me to Ka‘aba:

I am the way and my heart is that hill.

O Salm! Was it not for you my agony would not exist; so be kind

And there is no other prey but that lion.

I seek God’s forgiveness as purification for my (lowly) rank

Which is what is united between a creature and God.

SECTION 10

Comment

In the Basmala the Ba’ and the Sin adhere to each other because of a sublime secret: that the place of the Sin among the letters is at the sixth position,¹²⁶ which comprises six times the “One.”¹²⁷ These are the places in which the Ba’ appears, created and jointly referred to as “throne”. And in every part in which the Ba’ appears, is the countenance of God in its fullness. As also the (number) one is present in its fullness in each of the six positions of the Sin. You (should) know that the Sin is an expression of the secret of God - may He be exalted - the human being, that is.

Some interpreters (of the Qur’an) said (concerning) “Ya-Sin”¹²⁸ that the Ya’ in it is the letter of the vocative and the Sin (represents) the human being.¹²⁹ This discussion pertains to the field of symbolic expression, (as if) God - may He be exalted - were saying, “O human being!” while addressing Muḥammad - may God bless him and grant him salvation. That is, “O human being, essence (‘Ayn) of My being (Dhat)! By the sapient Qur’an!” (The words) “By the sapient Qur’an!”¹³⁰ are an attachment to “essence of My being” ascribed to the human being who is the mystery of the being and the mystery of the sapient Qur’an. You (should) know that the sapient Qur’an is an attribute of God - may He be exalted.

The conceptual significance of the Qur’an is the comprehension of which of the divine attributes are befitting only to (God). This comprehension is like a recitation. However there is no (chance) of you comprehending the divine being (Himself) because of the ineffability of His oneness, free of the plurality of the names and the like. So “each time you recite something from the sapient Qur’an - which is the attribute of God within yourself - the attributes of God will become manifest to you” according to the capacity of this level of recitation.

For this reason (the appellative) sapient has been attached to it, because the recitation at this level belongs to an order of divine sapience. In no way it comes to an end or reaches its climax or ever strays. Thus the order, God and sapience (constitute) the essence of being ('Ayn al-Dhat) that is you. The only thing that (appears) to your manifested consciousness (Shahada) is what your transcendent (Ghayb) (self) has recited from (within) you. As for what your transcendent (self) has not recited from (within) you, that is (intended) for your transcendent (self), not intended for your manifested consciousness. In fact, in essence the function of your manifested consciousness is the function of your transcendent (self).

You have been greatly confused by (the name) God. I refer (here) to the name which is given to the Essence (Dhat). Because it does not contain (Istifa)¹³¹ (His nature) in full. It does not reflect - that is -¹³² the conceptual significance of His (nature), even within the fullness¹³³ that is behind the name. God knows best (all that has to do) with Him. But in spite of this, this name is the one thing that does indeed represent (Waqā' 'ala) (God's nature).

If what we have said seems to contradict what we said earlier, this is because of the divisibility of our individual condition, which prevents us from grasping reality such as it is in itself: indivisible Essence. Therefore, the name Allah is suitable for the Essence. And if it is not suitable, (yet it still) is insofar as the Essence is not an object.

This matter causes shameful confusion to the intelligent, but agreeable confusion to the people of God.¹³⁴ Indeed if God - I mean the name - is confusing in itself, how much more confusing in this matter (will it be) for you (humble) servant!

I have become confused: where does my confusion come from?

My intellect is indeed confused in its delusive imagination.

I do not know whether this confusion is

Due to the ignorance of my intellect or to its knowledge.

In fact if I said it is due to ignorance I would be a liar.

But if I said it is due to knowledge, than I belong to it.¹³⁵

With this (same) meaning are my own words from a long poem for which there is no place here:

Does my conscience embrace the totality of Your Essence summarily and in detail
O, You Who are the sum of all the attributes!

Or is Your appearance too majestic for its hidden essence (Kunh) to be grasped?

What I grasp cannot be grasped in its nature (Dhat).

Alas You should be grasped! Alas people should be

Ignorant of You outside of their confusions!

The meaning of "Ya-Sin. By the sapient Qur'an!"¹³⁶ is the divine unintelligible Essence (Dhat) and the source ('Ayn) of the Qur'an as it is recited on behalf of God, laid down by the wisdom of pure unity.

"Indeed you¹³⁷ are one of (God's) emissaries":¹³⁸ from that exalted presence, holiness and unity, to this natural conditioned human place.

"On the straight path"¹³⁹ to the customary practice of the Eternal One Who stands on His own and with the whole world.

"Revelation of the Mighty Merciful One":¹⁴⁰ the revelation of the Mighty One who is not accessible except within this Mu' ammadan framework.

"The Most Merciful":¹⁴¹ because when He showed mercy on the world He wished that He should weaken Himself, Who is the Mighty One and humbled Himself in their bodies.¹⁴²

“Indeed has come unto you an apostle from among yourselves”¹⁴³ to direct them to Himself and entice them to Himself, out of His consideration for them and out of benevolence from the treasuries of His liberality towards them.

“He¹⁴⁴ cares for your condition”:¹⁴⁵ because he is the bearer for you, the agent in you and with you, and you have no existence, but absolute existence is in his being (Dhat). “With the believers”:¹⁴⁶ those, that is, who have believed that he is their essence (‘Ayn).

“Benevolent and most merciful.¹⁴⁷ And if they turn away”:¹⁴⁸ not accepting their understanding of the vision of Your unity in their plurality.¹⁴⁹

“Say: God is sufficient for me”:¹⁵⁰ because Divinity is the sum of everything: wherever you turn, the countenance of God is there. This is witness to them who flee from his right to his left, since both hands of God are right and blessed.¹⁵¹ (The Prophet) - may God bless him and grant him salvation - has meant mercy for the whole world, the one believing in him and the one not believing in him, the one acknowledging him and the one disowning him - may God bless him and grant him salvation.

We have been previously carried away by the enthusiasm of our discussion on the field of the Qur’an¹⁵² and we have conversed on secret heavenly matters.¹⁵³ So let us return to what we were concerned (before) with respect to an explanation of (the formula) “In the Name of God the All Compassionate and Most Merciful.”

SECTION 11

You (should) know that since the Alif (denotes) transcendent unity and the Sin is its visible mystery, the Mim is expression of what exists, which is the universal reality of (things) invisible and visible.

Don’t you see the hollow in the head of the Mim, how it is the abode of the white dot? (The concept) has been dealt in depth for you of the dot being the hidden treasure. So (let us) say that the circle of the hollow in the head of the Mim is the Truth Who in Himself manifests this hidden treasure. Don’t you see His words “I was a hidden treasure and I desired to be known. I created the creatures and I introduced Myself to them so they recognised Me”?¹⁵⁴ This is where the (divine) name Full of Majesty and Nobility¹⁵⁵ (comes) from, in the words (of God), “Blessed be the name of your Lord full of majesty and nobility.”¹⁵⁶ Because if (the word Name) had been an adjective of Your Lord it would have been in genitive case and Full of Majesty in nominative case, agreeing with the (word) Name, not with Your Lord.¹⁵⁷

May you understand (this).

You (should) know that the Mim is the soul of Muḥammad - may God bless him and grant him salvation - because the place where the hidden treasure appeared is the world, and Jabir mentioned in the ḥadith that the first thing that God created was the soul of Muḥammad - may God bless him and grant him salvation. He (then) created the whole world from it in the order (described) in the ḥadith.¹⁵⁸

The white dot in the hollow of the head of the Mim is the essence¹⁵⁹ of Muḥammad - may God bless him and grant him salvation - the hidden treasure,¹⁶⁰ the universal reality of the sublime Being and the sapient Qur’an in the fashion that we have explained.

Regarding this conceptual significance (of the Prophet) I have composed a poem: (“The Face of Creation” of the year 799)

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Messenger of God, O manifestation of the Divinity
O the one whose being is the pure being

You have manifested yourself in every sublime way
By intuition you conceal yourself from the eye
Through the attributes, “seven (oft-) repeated (verses)
And the Qur’an”

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- (that) noble being.

You were exclusively gifted with it; you deserved it;
Your reality similar to the sacred one (of God).
You inhabited Hind’s dwellings even though they were exalted

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And sublime and they wore the dress of concealment
The (divine) attributes are ever healing happiness
And through them you have glanced at the Divinity
Because you were there in principle before all
And your being is the intelligible (essence) of beings.

There was a reason why I recited these verses. Namely, that one night in the year 799 we gathered in the mosque of our sheikh, our lord and world teacher, the greatest authority, the “red sulphur,”¹⁶⁴ Sharif Al-Din Isma’il Bin Ibrahim Al-Jibrati,¹⁶⁵ to listen to a blind person. This was in the mosque cemetery, at the presence of the sheikh our brother the jurist Ahmad Al-abbani.¹⁶⁶ He read the Word of the Exalted One, “We have given you the seven (oft-) repeated (verses) and the sublime Qur’an.”¹⁶⁷

Then the Truth - may He be exalted - called me to contemplate the appropriation by His prophet Muhammad - may God bless him and grant him salvation - of the seven precious attributes which are life, knowledge, will, power, hearing, sight and speech (to the pertinent degree).¹⁶⁸ Beyond this appropriation of the attributes I saw that he - may God bless him and grant him salvation - is the essence (‘Ayn) of being (Dhat) concealed in the nature (Huwiyya) of the invisible (realities). This is what I referred to in verse (by saying), “The sublime Qur’an,” since there is no end to its recitation, and each time the heirs, the true people of the Qur’an read (in it) of the essence (Dhat) of God - may He be exalted – they read of Muhammad - may God bless and grant salvation to him and his family. To this refers the $\square$ adith in the words, “The people of the Qur’an are the people of God, His (own) property.”¹⁶⁹ Let one ponder.

He is the transcendent nature (Huwiyya) of the oneness and of all the messengers and the prophets and the heirs who recite the¹⁷⁰ nature of Muhammad - may God bless him and grant him salvation - in God. This is the meaning of him being mediator between the world and God, and to him refer his own words, “I am from God and the believers are from me.” May you understand (this).

SECTION 12

You (should) know that the number of the (letter) Mim is 40.¹⁷¹ The conceptual significance of communion¹⁷² is that this number corresponds to the degrees of existence after which nothing exists except what was before them.

The first degree is simply the Being (Dhat). The second degree is the “heavy Clouds” ($\square$ Ama’), i.e. the expression of the essence of the Being called gnosis. The third degree is the Unity, i.e. the expression of the mercifulness¹⁷³ of the Being in terms of hidden treasure. The fourth degree is Oneness, the first descent of the Being into names and attributes. The fifth degree is Divinity, the degree that comprises the (other) degrees of existence, from the highest to the lowest. The sixth degree is the (attribute) “All

Compassionate” described as¹⁷⁴ the highest degree of existence. The seventh degree¹⁷⁵ is Lordship, the degree requiring the existence of those lorded upon: this is where creation comes in. The eighth degree is the Throne (*Arsh*), which is the corporeal totality.¹⁷⁶ The ninth degree is the highest Pen, which is the First Intellect.¹⁷⁷ The tenth degree is the preserved Tablet, which is the soul of the whole. The eleventh degree is the Pedestal (*Kursi*), which is the Intellect of the whole denoting the heart. The twelfth degree is the primordial Matter (*Hayuli*). The thirteenth degree is the Atoms. The fourteenth degree is the celestial sphere of the Elements. The fifteenth degree is the celestial sphere of the Atlas. The sixteenth degree is the celestial sphere of the Zodiac. The seventeenth degree is the celestial sphere of Saturn. The eighteenth degree is the celestial sphere of Jupiter. The nineteenth degree is the celestial sphere of Mars. The twentieth degree is the celestial sphere of the Sun. The twenty-first degree is the celestial sphere of Venus. The twentysecond degree is the celestial sphere of Mercury. The twenty-third degree is the celestial sphere of the Moon. The twenty-fourth degree is the celestial sphere of Ether, which is the celestial sphere of Fire. The twenty-fifth degree is the celestial sphere of Air. The twentysixth degree is the celestial sphere of Water. The twenty-seventh degree is the celestial sphere of Earth.¹⁷⁸ The twenty-eighth degree is the celestial sphere of the generated things (*Muwalladat*).¹⁷⁹ The twenty-ninth degree is the celestial sphere of the simple Substance (*Jawhar*). The thirtieth degree is the celestial sphere of the necessary accident (‘*Ara*’).¹⁸⁰ The thirty-first degree is the Elements, that is, the Minerals. The thirty-second degree is the Plants. The thirty-third degree is the inanimate Objects. The thirty-fourth degree is the Animals. The thirty-fifth degree is the Human Being. The thirty-sixth degree is the realm of Forms (*Uwar*) to which the world is attached. The thirty-seventh degree is the realm of Concepts (*Al-ma’ani*) to which the ideas (*Barzakh*)¹⁸¹ are attached. The thirty-eighth degree is the realm of Realities to which judgement day is attached. The thirty-ninth degree is Paradise and Hell. The fortieth degree is the white Dune approached by the people of Paradise. It represents the manifestations of God - may He be exalted - and the mother of all abodes. After which there is nothing except the Being (*Dhat*).

Thus this number is the origin of (all) things and by it the leavening of the clay of Adam was completed, who is the first one of the human realm to come to existence. In light of the fourth numerical degree (of existence) it emerges that the universe in its totality has in itself only four qualities: permanent or propagating and dense or subtle, and nothing else besides these four. And together they make up the eye of this *Mu’ammadan Mim* of which we said that it is the totality of existence, permanent and temporal. Much can be said on this number concerning its ramifications in physics, ethnicities, compositions, classifications and the like. This¹⁸² would be enough for everyone who has perception in (one’s) heart. The name of an object is its illustration that is represented and that makes that object intelligible. Through (its name, the object) is distinguished from other (objects), just as something that has a hue (is distinguished) from what does not have a hue.

SECTION 13

The origin of the name Allah is *al-Ilah*. But the middle *Alif* was dropped and the *Lam* was joined to the one that follows. Thus the word became Allah. However originally it had seven letters: six countable and the seventh is the presumed *Waw* following the *Ha’*,¹⁸³ as one can see:

. They are the essence (*Ayn*) of the seven attributes representing the conceptual significance of “divinity.”

So the first Alif is the essence of the name of the living (God). Don't you see the diffusion of God's life in all that exists? And we have indeed explained to you the diffusion of the Alif in all the letters.

The second (letter) is the first Lam: it represents "will", which was the first consideration that the Truth had for the appearance of the world, as indicated in the *adith* with the words, "I was an unknown treasure and I longed¹⁸⁴ to be known." And the (word) "love" is only (another word for) "will".

The third (letter) is the second Alif. It represents "power" at work in every existing thing; indeed in all existing things¹⁸⁵ under the dominion of power.

The fourth (letter) is the second Lam, representing "knowledge", the beauty of God - may He be exalted - pertaining to His being and to His creation. In fact the pillar of the Lam is the seat of His knowledge of His (own) being, while the root of the Lam is the seat of His knowledge of His creation. Thus the same letter is the essence of the universal knowledge.

The fifth (letter) is the third Alif, representing the hearing of (the One Who) hears: "there is not a thing that will not celebrate his praise."¹⁸⁶

The sixth (letter) is the Ha', representing the sight of God. The circle of the Ha' reminds a person of the pupil through which (God) looks at the whole world. And the world is the white found in the eye of the circle of the Ha'. All this points to the notion that the universe has no existence outside God's view of it. Indeed if He lifted His sight from the world all would come to an end. Just like if the circle of the Ha' did not surround the white dot, this would not exist at all. But in spite of its existence (the white dot) remains, in relation to (the Ha'), in a state of non-existence. Because the whiteness that was present before the encircling of the Ha' is present after it. Just like the world in relation to God is in the condition it was before God created it - praise Him! May you understand (this), ponder this remarkable mystery and compare what I mentioned from outside of you with what is inside yourself. And the goal here is nothing more than your happiness and the discovery of your being.

The seventh (letter) is the raised Waw¹⁸⁷ - whose number is part of the sixth degree (of existence) - representing the concept (Ma^{na}) indicative of God's speech - may He be exalted. Don't you see, about (this number) six, how the parts whose ultimate limit is the perfection of the Throne of the All Compassionate - Who is in relation to all the parts - come in attendance of "Be!"? And just as the word of God - may He be exalted - has no limit, in the same way creation, which comes under the provident care of the Throne, is possible. And there is no limit to what is possible. Observe the lack of limit in the "Necessary Being" (Al-wajib al-wujud), how in the "possible conceivable being" (Al-mumkin al-ja'iz al-wujud)¹⁸⁸ - as well as in its absence - He has manifested Himself in His essence (*Ayn*).

Therefore these seven letters express the real concept of God (Allah) and His image nominally and in essence. Nothing is what it is except Him.

People differ (in opinion) on this name. Some say it derives from (the verb) *alaha* - *ya'lahu* - *ilhan*,¹⁸⁹ meaning to worship, therefore treating the verbal noun as a noun (indicating) the object of worship.¹⁹⁰ Thus saying *ilah* but adding to it the determinative Alif and its Lam to say Allah. Others say (it derives from) *alih*, understood as passionate love, thus making of the deity the source of love. Still others say it is a defective underived noun, whose origin is not (in the root word) *alh* but as it is it designates the "Necessary Being" Who originates the world, and that is nothing else but these five letters:

. And this is (also) our opinion, and proof for it is that God called Himself with this name before He created the universe. Because (the name) God does not need the universe, unlike (the other name) All Compassionate which points to the manifestation, in the one who receives mercy, of an act of mercy. From this it derives that God – may He be praised and exalted – is either manifest in (all) that exists or hidden in the knowledge of what is visible (only) to Him. May you understand (this). The same (applies) to Lord, Creator and the rest of the relational (Ra maniyya) names (of God) such as Provider, Giver, Avenger,¹⁹¹ Benefactor.¹⁹² By relational names I mean words that require a causal agent (Mu'aththir) whose effect (Athar) is shown in them. Such as Omniscient - which indeed requires a known (object) – and the One Who Hears and the One Who Sees (All¹⁹³), the All-Powerful, the (Well-) Wisher, the Speaker. Likewise the word Be! requires a creator. So this and others are relational names.

As by the aforementioned notion, the All Compassionate is God on the basis of what the (divine) throne deserves and contains.¹⁹⁴ Unlike His (other) name Allah – may He be exalted – which indeed is perception on the part of the being, and is essence (Huwiyya) of all essence, existence (Anniyya)¹⁹⁵ of all that exists¹⁹⁶ and supreme individuality.¹⁹⁷ His sight is not limited (but) He is not limited by sight. He is the container of (every)thing and its opposite. That is why some say that He is the source of existence and of non-existence. This expression “source of existence” is a clear (concept). But “source of non-existence” is a deep mystery. Of the people of God only those who are perfect can grasp it, according to their (spiritual) status. Or the one to whom a crack in the door has been opened before reaching this state. It is necessary to say on this subject (already) begun that this is an aspect of existence that is right here to call “non-existence” because of its perfection – may He be praised and exalted because He is worthy of great exaltation.

You (should) know that Allah is a noun that if you understand it will give you a name that contains (all) the degrees of divinity. You can envisage that this concept is more than you can understand and of a different nature (Dhat) from yours. This conceptual “non-existence” does not exist. Indeed what is intended (here) is your being. Hence, there is no creator except God. Hence none except you ? (No), rather none except God.

You (should) know that when we say “Truth”, “Creation”, “Lord” and “Slave” this is a gnomic sequence appropriate to one nature. The meaning of it all does not suffice, and if you stop there (at this level of meaning) with this periodic sequence, it is in fact a waste of time. Unless you are one who (can) smell musk when it is still in the gland (of the animal). Therefore all of this is¹⁹⁸ (as if) you have eaten meat with the hand of someone else and have given yourself the value appropriate to your condition and what is appropriate to your state. Whatever you found in this is the essence (Ayn) of truth and whatever you found (given) by God to you as a form of contact and unity is the essence of straying from the truth and is heresy.

What we are saying is only appreciated by a Persian Arab whose language is different from the language of the people (of the Arab nation) and whose place (of origin) is different from theirs.¹⁹⁹ (Or by one) who is giving away money which does not diminish. (Or by one) who is (directing) his abilities as if throwing a javelin towards the target - (representing) his goals – with a particular aim (and) with a strong straight arm, so that he won't miss his goal, nor have a broken javelin, nor lose his javelin, and his aiming eye will remain focused.²⁰⁰ God's divinity is beyond fading and His unity is undivided.

You (should) know that the name for God consists of six letters, and they are:

201 Because Alif is composed of three parts, and they are

" . The first (letter)

Lam is composed of three parts; the second Alif 202 is like the first one – the first and the last Lam. The Ha' is composed of two parts. The whole phrase is (then) made of 14 letters. Of these luminous letters the repeated ones have been dropped, so the remaining ones are .

The Alif has three worlds: the hidden world that cannot be perceived or seen at all; the gap world that may and may not be witnessed and seen; 203 the perceivable world. These are three worlds and, as far as what is present and what exists as a whole is concerned, there is nothing but these three worlds. 204

Don't you see that at the beginning (of the word Allah) there is the Alif, which starts with Hamza (pronounced) from the very depth of the chest that is never visible? And in the middle (of the Alif) is the Lam, (pronounced) from the centre of the palate and the mouth, hidden but that can be seen and perceived. And it ends with the labial Fa', which is totally visible. So it is evident that the Alif proceeds from the very hidden to the visible. The Lam belongs to the hidden world 205 and descends into the world of the very hidden because in the middle it contains the Alif, but becomes manifest at the end in the visible world because of the visible labial Fa' which is like the Mim 206 at the beginning and very hidden at the end. 207 The Mim 208 has a visible start, a hidden middle and a visible end. The Ya' 209 originates from the hidden world and ends in the very hidden world. It has no way out of where it is and has no horizon behind it. Then look to God the Collector 210 when He emerged from the very hidden into the hidden and then manifested Himself from the hidden into the visible like the Alif (does); and when He emerged from the hidden that can be perceived into the visible world like the Lam (does); and when He disappeared from the visible world into the hidden but perceivable and returned to His place in the visible world like the Mim does; and when He descended from the hidden world into the very hidden like the Ya' (does) even though still in the hidden world like the Ha'. All this is the essence of the nature of God and the divine truth according to the provident care of the divine order.

Understand and see how wonderful is the complexity of the structure of this Name in its various worlds (that constitute it). 211 And how wonderful its form. And if we want to say more about it we would not have enough space. And this limited (work) is not the place for it.

You (should) know that the world that we referred to as "the very hidden" is a detail of the perfection of divine nature and to comprehend it is not at all possible. And the world that we referred to as "hidden" 212 is the hidden divine world by which the All Compassionate is worthy to be called by (His) fair names. 213 And the visible world is the world of the kingdom – and by "kingdom" I mean all that is included in the throne in spirit, corporality and conceptual significance (Ma'na).

You (should) know and understand how the secret of all this is about the Name of God and how He manifests Himself according to His Name. You (should) know that the absolute Being is contained in God but God is greater than the being outside (Himself). Because the many manifestations of being are not God and have nothing divine in them. But every manifestation of God is the perfect Being. This provided that you understand not to separate between God and Being. Never imagine that I numbered (them), separated (them), prevented (them), compared (them), or made (them) corporeal. I am innocent of this wrong impression; it is rather your understanding that cannot contain what I said. And

I seek refuge in God if you understand but you don't have acceptance and knowledge of the divinity. We seek refuge in God from this and we ask for His help to lead us on His straight way which He Himself travels.

SECTION 15

The Throne is the macrocosm²¹⁴ and it is there that the All Compassionate sits. While the human being is the microcosm²¹⁵ where God (also) resides. Because He created Adam in His image.²¹⁶ And look at this small nice human world, how it is greater and more honourable than the great world. And contemplate how the great is small and the small is great, although each has its (proper) place and status. If you knew this mystery you would know the meaning of His saying, "The heart of My faithful servant contains Me." But regarding his saying, "There is a time for me with God when no favourite being or sent prophet contains me", it is clear that nobody at this time contains him except for God. How many sent prophets, favourite kings and knowledgeable authorities have contained the Throne – which is the whole great world – and did not realise it or care about it? For the greatness of this fine humanity, and its honour and its superiority over the great world has become manifest. It appeared that the great world is like a drop in the ocean, but the ocean – although large – is (founded) on this drop and made of it. A dot on each part of the circle has its own special portion (of the whole circle) and it contributes to the (composition of) the circle. Also, it cannot be counted and therefore cannot be divided.

So the dot is the Name "God" and the ocean is the Name "All Compassionate." God - may He be exalted – says, "Say! Call upon God or call upon the All Compassionate: by whatever name you call upon Him (it is well), for to Him belong the fair Names".²¹⁷

We have explained to you that the dot with every part of the circle has a relation and a contribution. And there is no doubt that these relations and contributions are also to the circle as a whole. So each (dot), when to it we refer these relations and contributions, is worthy. As with all the fair Names, if by them you call upon or describe the Name of God, they refer to Him.²¹⁸ As for (the name) "All Compassionate" (it refers) only to one of God's - may He be exalted - manifestations in which He appears (in a manner) appropriate to the classification of oneness.²¹⁹ As for the circle it has the essence (Ayn) of the dot because the dot appears in each of its parts. Therefore the circle is made of nothing (else) but the dot.

You (should) know that (the name) "All Compassionate" is a verbal noun²²⁰ and whenever this quality is present in an adjective it is because of the prevalence of this characterisation in the described object. Which refers to the strength of the conspicuousness of this characterisation in the described (object). Which is why His Name "All Compassionate" is a noun that appears in (this) life and the next.²²¹ This is different from His Name "Most Merciful" as mercy in the next (life) is more conspicuous than in (this) life. As (reported) in the Qadith, "God created Mercy and made it into one hundred parts. He withheld with Him ninety-nine parts – in the next (life) not to be made manifest until the day of resurrection - and sent its one part to all His creatures - in (this) life, who by (these mercies) communicate and exchange mercy."²²² The mystery of His Name "Most Merciful" is the end of the world in God - may He be exalted - and the return of creation to the Truth; for indeed all ends in God. Is not everything moving towards God? For whom is the kingdom of today? For God the one, the victorious.

POETRY

Let us come back to how we were –

For neither you betrayed our covenant nor did we betray yours -
And leave behind slandering and slanderers, and a bird,
A crow that cawed in our house to cause separation between us.
We wrap up the rug of blame, attachment and estrangement
And we throw away evil and difference: may evil perish,
May unity return to our neighborhood as
We used to have, the fruits of reunification cultivated.
The groom in (this) situation sings about us, saying:
May God not return to a house which deserted us.
Our beloved be relieved, for what happened was nothing
But a dream, like a meaningless word.
No desertion was prolonged; there was no one reproaching
And the one yearning has not kept watch at night as he yearned
And what you said has not been, and what happened has not been,
And you have not left us, and we have not left you.